

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-02 SS-14 ISO-00 HA-02 SP-02 NSC-05 INR-05

MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 PRS-01 H-01 TRSE-00

L-01 /046 W

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R 242141Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8904

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 0488

LIMDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 3)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: GT, MASS, SHUM

SUBJ: TODMAN CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT LAUGERUD, JANUARY 23

1. SUMMARY: DURING ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN'S CALL ON PRESIDENT LAUGERUD, LATTER DEFENDED HIS ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, SEEMED NOT TO BALK AT PROSPECT OF ANOTHER HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON GUATEMALA AND GAVE EVERY INDICATION OF A DISPOSITION TO WAIT OUT THE USG DECISION ON F-5'S, DESPITE BEING TOLD HOW DIM THE CHANCES APPEARED FOR PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL OF THE SALE. END SUMMARY

2. ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR AND ARA/CEN DIRECTOR MATTHEWS, TODMAN CALLED ON PRESIDENT LAUGERUD JANUARY 23. FOREIGN MINISTER MOLINA WAS PRESENT DURING THE 1-1/2 HOUR CONVERSATION
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WHICH, IN ADDITION TO BELIZE (SEPTTEL), DEALT LARGELY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE STATUS OF THE GOG'S REQUEST TO BUY F-5 AIRCRAFT. PRESIDENT WAS WARM AND RELAXED THROUGHOUT.

3. AFTER INQUIRING ABOUT MRS. LAUGERUD'S HEALTH, TODMAN THANKED PRESIDENT FOR NAMING THE KENNETH WOOLEY BRIDGE AFTER THE AMERICAN PRIVATE WHO DIED IN THE EARTHQUAKE

RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT. LAUGERUD SAID HIS GESTURE WAS INFLUENCED BY A DESIRE TO REMIND THE GUATEMALAN PEOPLE OF U.S. FRIENDSHIP AND SUPPORT AND THUS COUNTERACT "LARGELY UNJUSTIFIED ANTAGONISMS" WHICH HAD GROWN UP TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES OVER THE YEARS.

4. TODMAN TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO REAFFIRM THE COMMITMENT OF THE USG AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO HUMAN RIGHTS. THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED THAT THE GOG VALUES AND RESPECTS HUMAN RIGHTS. HE TOOK PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION HAD SUCCESSFULLY RESISTED INVOCATION OF A STATE OF SIEGE, DESPITE THE EARTHQUAKE DISRUPTION, ALLEGATIONS OF WEAKNESS BY THE RIGHT, THE MISGIVINGS OF FRUSTRATED TROOP COMMANDERS IN GUERILLA AREAS AND PROVOCATIONS BY THE CASTRO-SUPPORTED LEFT WHICH HOPES TO PRODUCE MARTYRS. HE HAD SHOWN RESTRAINT IN ORDER TO LEAVE WITH GUATEMALANS THE LESSON THAT TO GOVERN IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO CURB HUMAN AND POLITICAL RIGHTS. A STATE OF SIEGE IS A FINAL RECOURSE, HE SAID, AND IN ANY EVENT COUNTERPRODUCTIVE IN THAT IT AGGRAVATES THE PROBLEMS WHICH PROMPT IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

5. NEVERTHELESS LAUGERUD LAMENTED THE INEFFICIENCY OF THE EXISTING LEGAL APPARATUS IN DEALING WITH TERRORISTS AND CRIMINALS. THE 6,000-PERSON POLICE FORCE COULD NOT COPE WITH THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM AND ONEROUS
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EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS OF THE PENAL CODE ALLOW MANY OFFENDERS TO GO SCOT FREE. EVEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROSCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PGT) SERVED AS A HINDRANCE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT. IF THE PGT WERE A REGISTERED PARTY, HE NOTED, THE NAMES OF ITS MEMBERS WOULD BE A MATTER OF PUBLIC RECORD. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD THEN AT LEAST KNOW WHO THEY WERE. MOREOVER, HUMAN RIGHTS WAS A "TWO-WAY STREET." HE ASKED RHETORICALLY, "WHAT ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE SLAIN BODYGUARDS OF (KIDNAPPED EX-FOREIGN MINISTER ROBERTO) HERRERA?"

6. LINKING IT TO THE REMAINING VIGOR OF THE TERRORIST LEFT IN GUATEMALA, THE PRESIDENT TRACED FIDEL CASTRO'S "UNREASONING HATRED" OF THE GOG TO GUATEMALA'S ROLE AS TRAINING AND STAGING AREA FOR THE BAY OF PIGS INVADERS. IN SO DOING HE SEEMED TO BE SUGGESTING U.S. RESPONSIBILITY FOR AT LEAST SOME OF GUATEMALA'S INTERNAL SECURITY CUM HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM.

7. TODMAN DISCUSSED U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA, NOTING IN

THE PROCESS THAT WE HAVE MADE IT CLEAR TO CASTRO THAT
NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS IS IMPOSSIBLE WHILE CUBA
CONTINUES TO INTERFERE IN THE AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 0488
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8. TODMAN TOOK ENCOURAGEMENT FROM LAUGERUD'S RESTRAINT
IN THE FACE OF PROVOCATION AND PRESSURES, AND
FROM HIS EXPRESSED COMMITMENT TO DEAL WITH SECURITY
PROBLEMS WITHIN THE EXISTING CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK.
HE REMINDED THE PRESIDENT OF THE U.S. LEGISLATIVE
REQUIREMENT FOR ANOTHER HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON GUATEMALA.
ALLUDING TO THE GOG'S DENUNCIATION OF LAST YEAR'S REPORT
AS INTERVENTION IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, TODMAN EXPRESSED THE
HOPE THAT THIS YEAR'S REPORT, NOW IN PREPARATION, WOULD
CAUSE NO PROBLEMS. HE PROMISED A COPY OF THE REPORT TO
THE GOG BEFORE ITS SUBMISSION TO CONGRESS.

9. PRESIDENT LAUGERUD LIMITED HIS REACTION TO THE
COMMENT "NO ONE HAS A MONOPOLY ON THE TRUTH." WITHOUT
THE GOVERNMENT'S VERSION OF EVENTS, THE PICTURE IS INCOMPLETE,
HE ADDED. IN AGAIN EXPRESSING PRIDE IN HIS ADMINISTRATION'S
HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, HE ASSERTED THAT ALL DETAINEES
"GO TO COURT." HE ALSO TOOK CREDIT FOR THE RELATIVELY
PEACEFUL ELECTIONEERING TO DATE BUT SAID HE WOULD BE
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SPEAKING AGAIN TO PARTY LEADERS TO GET THEM TO TONE DOWN
RISING CAMPAIGN RHETORIC.

10. TODMAN TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO RAISE THE F-5 ISSUE.
HE APOLOGIZED FOR THE DELAY IN REPLYING TO THE
PRESIDENT'S SEPTEMBER 1977 REQUEST. IT POSED A VERY
DIFFICULT PROBLEM, NOT LEAST BECAUSE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
POLICY AGAINST THE SALE OF SUPERSONICS TO THE AREA, EVEN
THOUGH THERE IS RECOGNITION THAT DENIED REQUESTERS
WILL TURN ELSEWHERE. WE WANT CLOSE TIES, TODMAN STATED, BUT
ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THAT THIS POLICY MAY CAUSE SOME
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS TO SUFFER. TODMAN SAID HE WAS NOT
OPTIMISTIC THAT PRESIDENT CARTER WILL WANT TO MAKE AN
EXCEPTION TO THIS POLICY FOR GUATEMALA, BUT OFFERED TO
PURSUE THE REQUEST NEVERTHELESS IF THAT WAS PRESIDENT
LAUGERUD'S DESIRE AND GO GIVE A DEFINITIVE ANSWER SHORTLY.

11. LAUGERUD REPLIED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD, AND RECITED A
LITANY OF REASONS WHY GUATEMALA WANTED TO BUY FROM THE
UNITED STATES. HE ALSO ARGUED, IN THE LIGHT OF SALVADORAN
AND HONDURAN ACQUISITIONS, THAT ALL GUATEMALA SOUGHT WAS TO
RESTORE EQUILIBRIUM AMONG THE CENTRAL AMERICAN AIR FORCES
BY PROVIDING ITSELF WITH A PROVEN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM WHICH
THE F-5 REPRESENTS. "NO ONE RESPECTS A WEAK NATION," HE
REMARKED. THE GOG HAD EXPLORED FRENCH AND ITALIAN
INTERCEPTORS BUT, HE REPEATED, FAR PREFERRED THE U.S.
PRODUCT. "WE WILL WAIT. MAYBE WE'LL BE LUCKY," HE
CONCLUDED.

12. BEFORE LEAVING THE SUBJECT TODMAN STRESSED THE DEPTH
OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S AND THE SECRETARY'S COMMITMENT TO
ARMS SALES RESTRAINT, INCLUDING PROGRESSIVE ANNUAL
REDUCTIONS IN THE VOLUME OF U.S. SALES ABROAD.
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